

HIRING, RETENTION & TRAINING

Employers' Perspectives on Trade and Soft Skills in South Carolina

A project conducted by the University of South
Carolina for the South Carolina Workforce
Investment Board

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Study Purpose

Gather input from business community to identify competitive workforce training needs

- academic
- technical
- soft skills

Agenda Topics

- skills needed in hiring
- skills needed in retention
- future skill requirements
- employer concerns
- implications for training

Methodology

- focus groups in all 46 counties
- 328 participants
- average group size 6.7
- responses confidential
- 3 rating scales
- 8 open discussion questions

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Sector	HR	Super visor	Other	%
Manufacturing/ Technical	69	58	0	38%
Government	14	45	35	29%
Service/Retail	12	26	4	13%
Economic Development	0	8	25	10%
Health Services	16	10	0	8%
Hospitality	1	5	0	2%
Total	112	152	64	100%

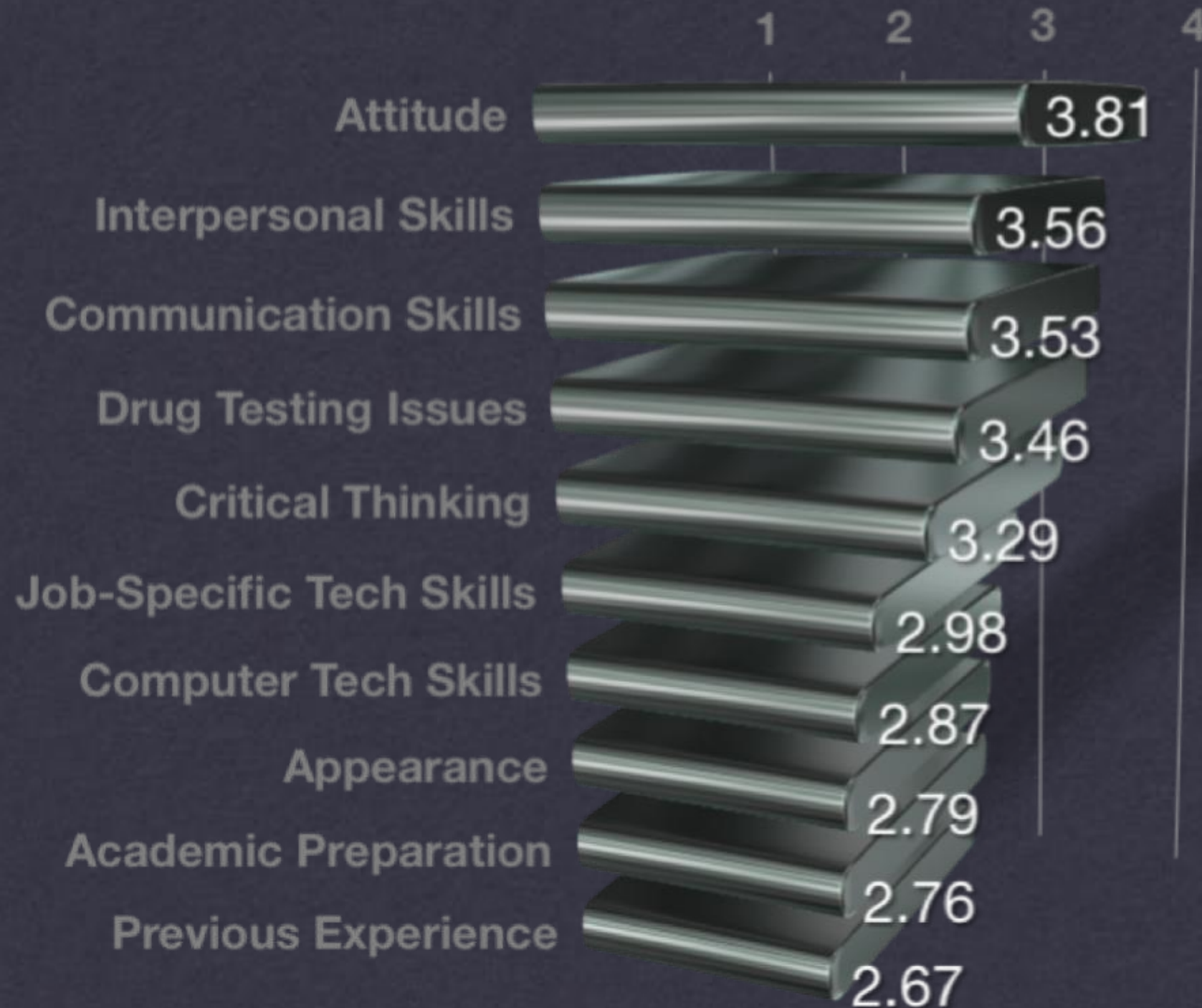
Soft Skills

- “people” skills needed for everyday life and work
- how people relate to each other
- some behaviors are effective, others may create problems

Trade Skills

- technical or administrative procedures related to an organization’s core business

Soft Versus Trade Skills



- Both viewed as important.
- Trade skills necessary for certain jobs (some require degrees or certification).
- Soft skills make difference between candidates in hiring process.
- Job level determines importance. Lower level jobs can train for trade skills, so soft skills become more important.
- Customer service jobs need primarily soft skills.

FACTORS IN HIRING

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 4 WITH 1 BEING "NOT IMPORTANT" AND 4 BEING "VERY IMPORTANT"

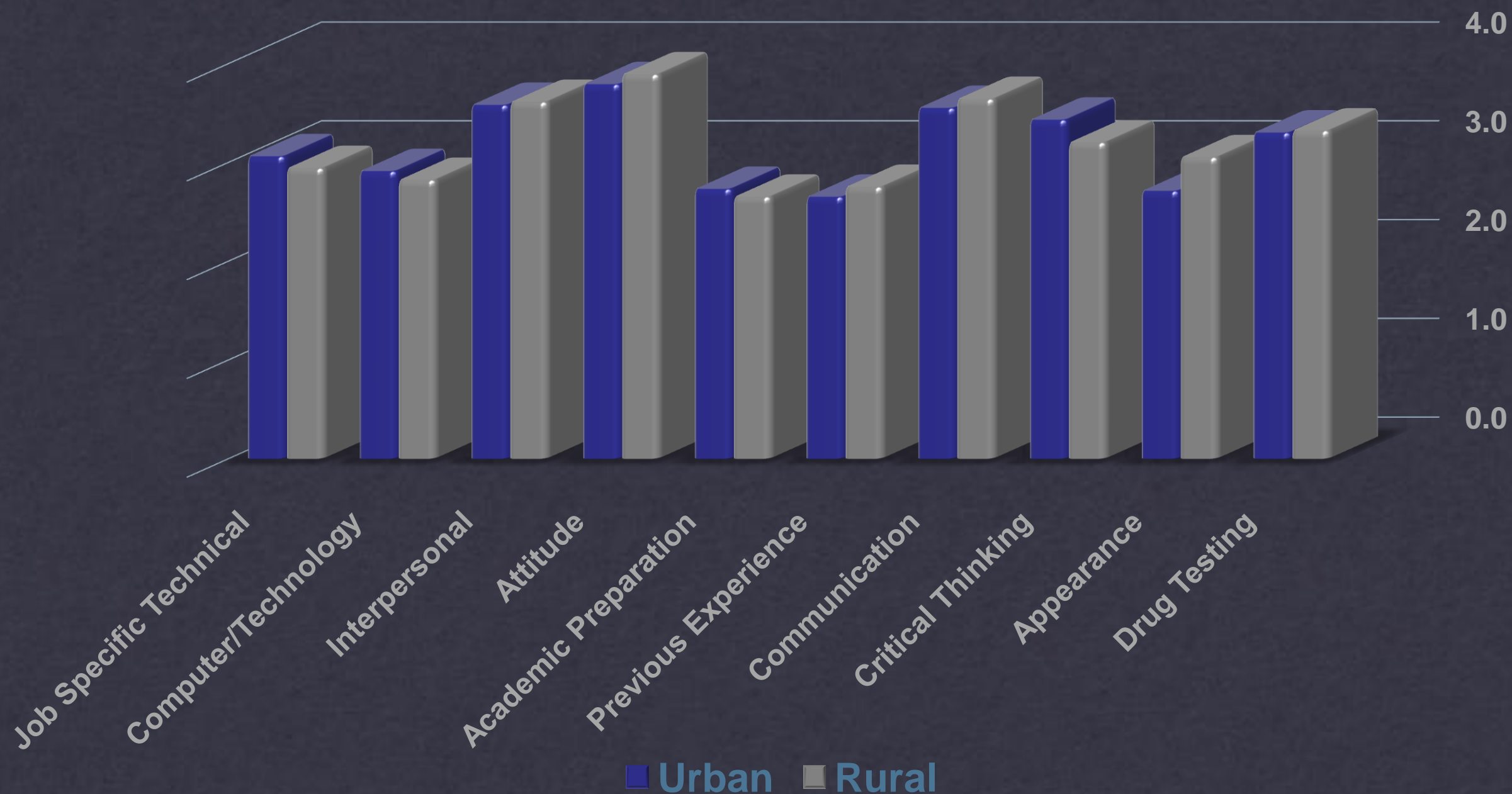
Hiring: Critical Soft Skills

- work ethic
- attitude/enthusiasm
- punctuality/dependability
- communication
- teamwork/interpersonal (getting along with others)
- customer service/business etiquette
- initiative (implementing or presenting ideas)
- adaptability/flexibility
- accountability
- integrity/loyalty

Hiring: Identifying Soft Skills

- difficult to assess but important in hiring
- methods used
 - “behavioral interviewing” to better assess soft skills
 - peer, panel, or multiple interviewers
 - referrals/recommendations from current employees
 - temporary hires to observe soft skills
 - program referrals on persons screened and/or trained (i.e., One Stop, technical colleges, etc.)
- organizations willing to do technical training but not soft skills training for new hires

Hiring: Urban Vs. Rural





Soft Versus Trade Skills

- Soft skills make *the* difference in retention.
- Someone with good soft skills will be retained even when not as adept with technical skills.
- Soft skills considered when dealing with retraining and moving within organization.
- Soft skills important for management and customer service positions
- Small proportion report using productivity in retention decisions due to difficult nature of evaluating soft skills.

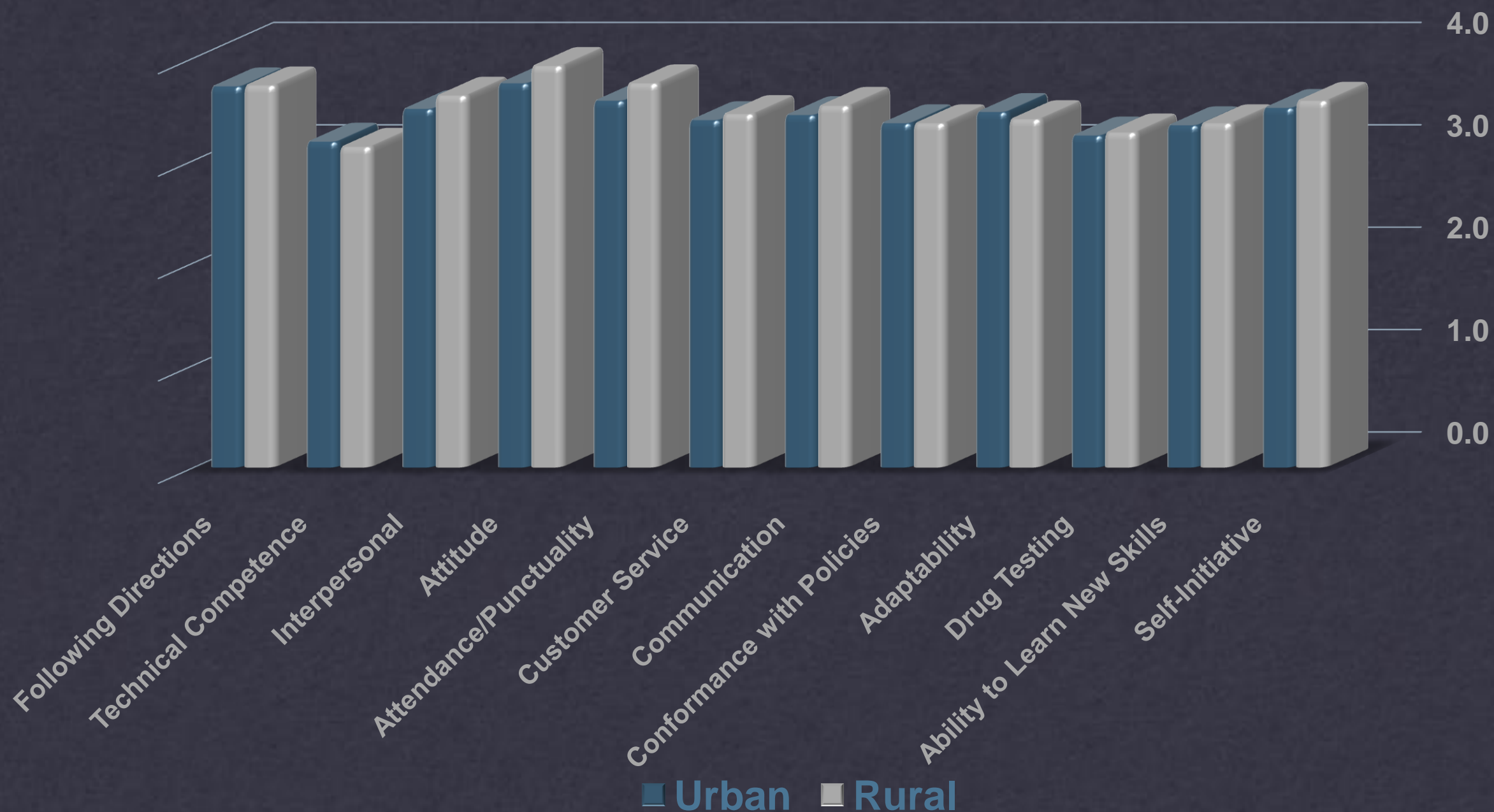
FACTORS IN RETENTION

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 4 WITH 1 BEING “NOT IMPORTANT” AND 4 BEING “VERY IMPORTANT”

Retention: Critical Soft Skills

- reliability/attendance
- attitude
- teamwork (ability to get along with others)
- communication
- initiative/motivation
- receiving criticism from staff and/or supervisors
- leadership
- accountability
- time management and organizational skills
- respect and adherence to organizational policy

Retention: Urban Vs. Rural



Soft Skills

- Flexibility/Adaptability to change
- Multi-tasking/Cross training
- Teamwork
- Self-initiative
- Oral and written communication
- Critical thinking skills/Problem solving
- Diversity awareness

Trade Skills

- Networking/Computer technology
- Electronic/Mechanical
- Process engineers/Engineering/Sciences
- Robotics training/Technical maintenance
- Welding
- Tool and dye work
- Other academic skills
 - Math, listening, reading comprehension, and writing
 - Oral language skills/Speaking foreign languages
 - Understanding global economy and cultural differences

FUTURE SKILL NEEDS

SKILLS MOST IMPORTANT FOR FUTURE WORKFORCE



AREAS OF CONCERN

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 8, WITH 8 AFFECTING THE MOST EMPLOYEES

Training Needs

- work ethic (multi-dimensional concept)
- basic academic skills
 - high school diplomas/GEDs, math, sciences, oral/written communication, listening/reading comprehension, machine logic
- adaptability, creativity, and multi-tasking
- critical thinking and problem-solving
- employability/soft skills
 - knowledge of world of work, appropriate workplace behavior, teamwork, drug education, customer service, cultural understanding

- How and when should soft skills training take place?
- Many individuals unaware of available services and programs.
- Improved training/transitional programs from high school to manufacturing required.
- Strategic plan needed to establish training priorities.
- Employment concentrations shifting from manufacturing to service industries.
- Value of technical education needs to be enhanced (Pathways to Success).
- A disconnect exists between what is learned in primary and secondary education and what is needed to move into workplace (high school exit exam versus feedback from industry).
- Strategies to reduce absenteeism need to be developed.
- Training inventory/clearinghouse needs to be constructed.

ISSUES AND FOLLOW-UP

ISSUES FACING TRAINING A COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

Conclusion

- both trade and soft skills important in hiring and retention decisions across all industry sectors
- soft skills most important for
 - retention
 - certain job levels where trade skills can be taught internally
 - customer service positions
- findings consistent with national and local studies (Greenwood and Dillon)
- no distinct differences between urban and rural

Recommendations

- preparation in soft skills would benefit portions of South Carolina's workforce
- research has not established "best practices" for comprehensive soft skills training
- integration of soft and/or life skills instruction should be investigated for the following:
 - primary and secondary education
 - job search and counseling
 - workforce trade skill training
 - adult education